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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 000842

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS CONTINUE TO DWINDLE, BUT NO END  
IN SIGHT

REF: TBILISI 827

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Non-parliamentary opposition leaders addressed a crowd of about 1500 in front of Parliament on Thursday, April 30 and announced their plan to picket the Public Broadcasters Building starting at 9:00 am on May 1. Nino Burjanadze stated that the opposition needed to take more effective steps but did not elaborate. She also said that if the protests fail, Georgia will become a dictatorship. The Parliament, Public Broadcasters Building, State Chancellery, and Rustaveli Avenue all remain blocked by protesters although foot traffic is allowed to pass. The Prime Minister told the Ambassador that the going price to hire a person to stay overnight in a cell has dropped off. EU Special Representative Semneby returned to Tbilisi May 1. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Both in their public and private comments, non-parliamentary leaders are alleging that the public (including the Diplomatic Corps) is not "getting the message" and does not evaluate current events through the same prism they do. The non-parliamentary opposition is arguing that this is because of media manipulation or GoG oppression rather than a rejection of the message itself. Among the non-parliamentary opposition, there seems to be a growing sense that the protests are not going to lead to President Saakashvili's resignation, but there is no agreement on next steps. We are continuing to push for dialogue and are urging non-parliamentary leaders to focus their demands on issues short of Saakashvili's resignation. End Comment.

Small Protest Again

¶3. (C) Embassy observers estimate Thursday's crowd at approximately 1500 protesters. Local businessmen are complaining to us about the smell from human excrement and having to clean drug paraphernalia off the street every morning. Nothing has changed regarding the protests over the last week, although non-parliamentary opposition staged a rally in front of the Public Broadcasters Building early Friday morning, May 1, which gathered about 300-500 protesters. No other plan was announced, and Saakashvili's resignation was again demanded by non-parliamentary leaders. Embassy contacts are increasingly expressing their frustration at the protesters. The Prime Minister told the Ambassador on April 30, that the going price for those staying overnight in the cells has fallen way off. He said that protesters are being paid 25 GEL to stay in a cell at the Chancellery and 30-35 GEL at the Parliament.

GoG Still Willing to Negotiate

¶4. (C) Parliamentary Speaker Bakradze was scheduled to meet April 30 with Irakli Alasania (Alliance), but Alasania called off the meeting. GoG officials told us they hope the meeting will occur Friday night. EU representative Peter Semneby is

in Tbilisi and expects to meet with a number of leaders. Semneby told Ambassador that he will push non-parliamentary leaders to adjust their demands and accept a dialogue. Semneby agreed with the Ambassador that the GoG seemed legitimately ready to have a serious dialogue, although he was unsure how many in the non-parliamentary opposition felt the same. According to Semneby, Alasania had expressed his desire to break with the non-parliamentary opposition, although noted that Alasania felt like he needed political cover and would be attacked viciously by the non-parliamentary opposition. (Embassy Comment: We agree Qthat Alasania is looking for a way out; however, we have little indication that any other non-parliamentary figure is currently ready to make a similar jump to provide him "cover". The Ambassador was due to meet Nino Burjanadze on May 1 to urge her to engage in serious dialogue. End Comment.)  
TEFFT